



# The Harbinger

Newsletter of the  
Illinois Native Plant Society

AUTUMN 2015

Vol. 32, No. 3

*"... dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and study of native plants and vegetation in Illinois."*



Sweet Fern (*Comptonia peregrina*)

This issue begins with the first article in a series that I am calling "Quiet Places." It will be portraits of nature preserves in all parts of the state. The first is Sweet Fern Savanna Land and Water Preserve in Pembroke, which is owned and managed by Marianne Hahn. Over a thirteen-year period, botanists have identified 440 native species on the site, 16 of which are state-listed! Sweet Fern is a wonderfully quiet place too where you can lose all touch with civilization and its noise. I recommend it. Next month we'll visit Lily Cache Prairie, a restoration. After that, who knows?

*Victor M. Cassidy, Editor*

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Meadow Beauty  
(*Rhexia virginica*)

## **Governing Board**

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Chris Benda

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Janine Catchpole

### **President-Elect**

Paul Marcum

### **Secretary**

Rachel Goad

### **Treasurer**

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## **Message from the President**

A lot has happened since the last issue of *The Harbinger*, both for INPS and me personally. At the end of August I married Susan Barry, my girlfriend of over 3 years, and we went on a honeymoon to Maine. We plan to leave our rental in Palatine and move full-time to our home in the woods south of Carbondale later this year.

There was also a rare astronomical event this week which coincided with a celebration the Friends of Langham Island, INPS Kankakee Torrent Chapter, and Plants of Concern (citizen science program) hosted at Camp Shaw-waw-nas-see. The groups celebrated of the stewardship work done to restore Langham Island and its rare plant populations and saw terrific views of the supermoon and eclipse.

Other events I'd like to share with you are the grass and fern workshops held in southern Illinois this season. President-elect Paul Marcum led an informative workshop about Illinois grasses and many species were observed in the field. Thanks to Rob and Rhonda Rothrock for providing the field site and to the Plant Biology Department at Southern Illinois University for use of their labs. The next month, Eric Ulaszek and I co-led a workshop on Illinois ferns at Camp Ondessonk. It was an outstanding event! Read more about it on page 6. The workshops were made possible by a grant from the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund.

Illinois has been proclaimed Oaktober (Oak Awareness Month) by Governor Rauner and as I mentioned in the last newsletter, INPS was one of the many organizations that advocated for this event. Read more about it on page 13.

One of the several changes approved by the membership at the last Annual Gathering was an increase in membership dues and the addition of some new categories. These changes are effective as of October 1<sup>st</sup> and can be seen on the renewal form at the end of the newsletter. Also, any new memberships received after October each year will be good for the remaining quarter of that year as well as the following year. I will lead by example and be the first to signup as a life member at the Iliamna level. I am proud to support this great organization!

Another important order of business is the election of the executive board. We have two new board members, Amanda Pankau and Keri Shimp, and two incumbent members, Rachel Goad and Cassi Saari. Please fill out the ballot on the next page and follow the instructions. A huge thank you to Vicki Crosley (treasurer), Connie Cunningham (membership), and Andy West (Erigenia) for their years of dutiful service. We are incredibly grateful for their efforts!

The next governing board meeting will be via conference call on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 from 6:00 – 9:00pm. Meetings are open to all members so let me know if you wish to participate. Lastly, here are some photos of me nerding out with the instructors of our recent workshops. And as always, thanks for your membership!

~Chris Benda



Chris Benda and Paul Marcum



Chris Benda and Eric Ulaszek

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# INPS 2016 Governing Board Election Ballot



## **Amanka Pankau**

### **Membership Coordinator**

Amanda Pankau has a B.S. in Ecology, Ethology, and Evolution from the University of Illinois. In 2004 she moved to Carbondale and completed a M.S. in Wildlife Ecology, conducting research on wetlands in the Cache River watershed. From 2007-2014 she worked as a Biologist for an engineering firm in southern IL, specializing on wetland and stream delineation and mitigation, as well as threatened and endangered species consultations. She is currently taking a short break from that to focus on the all too important work of raising two little boys into future naturalists!



## **Keri Shimp**

### **Treasurer**

Keri Shimp is currently the Administrative Specialist for the Shawnee National Forest and Midewin Tallgrass Prairie. She has been employed by the US Forest Service for 36 years and is set to retire in 2016. Keri spent most of her career with the Forest Service in budget and finance. She lives in Harrisburg with her husband and enjoys camping and spending time with her grandchildren.



## **Rachel Goad**

### **Secretary (Incumbent)**

Rachel Goad has served as secretary for the state INPS board since 2012, and served as secretary for the Northeast Chapter since 2013. She manages the Plants of Concern program, a citizen science rare plant monitoring effort in the Chicago region. She has a Master's degree in Plant Biology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Illinois State University.



## **Cassi Saari**

### **Webmaster (Incumbent)**

Cassi Saari began her reign as webmaster of the Illinois Native Plant Society in 2014. Her dayjob as an ecological consultant with ecology + vision, llc has her conducting plant inventories, tree surveys, wetland delineations, and natural areas assessments. Cassi also helps organize the Chicago-based habitat restoration volunteer group, Habitat 2030. Cassi received her bachelor's degree in environmental sciences from Northwestern University.



## **Other Positions**

The current president, past president, and president-elect are on a 2-year term and will be up for election next year. Jean Sellar is overseeing the next publication of *Erigenia* and we will be forming a committee for future issues.

## **Please vote for officers**

Please print out this ballot and return to P.O. Box 271, Carbondale, IL 62903, reply to [illinoisplants@gmail.com](mailto:illinoisplants@gmail.com), or give this ballot to your chapter representative. Even though each position is unopposed, we appreciate receiving your vote.

## **Thanks for your service!**

The Illinois Native Plant Society exists because of our volunteer governing board and statewide membership. We are grateful to Vicki Crosley (treasurer), Connie Cunningham (membership), Andy West (*Erigenia* editor) for their service. As always, if you are interested in serving on the governing board, please contact [illinoisplants@gmail.com](mailto:illinoisplants@gmail.com).

# INPS CHAPTER NEWS

## NORTHEAST CHAPTER - Chicago

Andy Olnas (President)  
847-840-2634  
[northeast.inps@gmail.com](mailto:northeast.inps@gmail.com)

## FOREST GLEN CHAPTER - Danville

Connie Cunningham (President)  
217-516-1792  
[conniejcunningham@gmail.com](mailto:conniejcunningham@gmail.com)

## QUAD CITIES CHAPTER - Rock Island

Bo Dziadyk (President)  
309-794-3436  
[bohbanddziadyk@augustana.edu](mailto:bohbanddziadyk@augustana.edu)

## KANKAKEE TORRENT CHAPTER- Bourbonnais

Janine Catchpole (President)  
[j9-catchpole@comcast.com](mailto:j9-catchpole@comcast.com)

## IRENE CULL CHAPTER - Peoria

Mary Hartley (President)  
309-995-3356  
[haywool@winco.net](mailto:haywool@winco.net)

## CENTRAL CHAPTER - Springfield

Annette Chinuge (President)  
217-483-5893  
[annette@avrosystems.com](mailto:annette@avrosystems.com)

## GRAND PRAIRIE CHAPTER – Bloomington/Normal

Roger Anderson (President)  
[rcander@illinoisstate.edu](mailto:rcander@illinoisstate.edu)

## SOUTHERN CHAPTER - Carbondale

Chris Benda (President)  
217-417-4145  
[southernillinoisplants@gmail.com](mailto:southernillinoisplants@gmail.com)



## NORTHEAST CHAPTER (Chicago)

On August 1, about 15 of us hiked through the Montrose Beach Dunes natural area in Chicago. The star of the trip was the Common Bladderwort (*Utricularia macrorhiza*), which has not been seen at this site before. We attribute its emergence to the hard work of restoration volunteers. *Utricularia* is a carnivorous plant that feeds on aquatic invertebrates that it traps in its submerged bladders. It typically grows in poor habitats. Hiking along the designated trails, we saw blooming plants that included Kalm's lobelia (*Lobelia kalmia*), Kalm's St. John's Wort (*Hypericum kalmianum*), Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), and many others. Montrose Beach is home to over twenty state-listed plant species and we saw several of these.

On August 16, we visited the restoration areas and gardens at Ball Horticultural Co. in West Chicago. We first visited the created wetland where 100 native species have been seeded in and planted as seedlings. The soils are rich and the plants correspondingly tall. We noted an abundance of grass, sedge, and composite species, also some 12-ft.-high Prairie Dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*) and the Brown-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*).

After passing through the Ball Horticultural Gardens, we reached the wet wooded area where we saw additional species along the creek and in the moist uplands. These included White Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) and obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*).

UPCOMING FIELD TRIP! Come join Laurie Ryan, Plant Ecologist for the McHenry County Conservation District, on a field trip to Hidden Fen south of the Nippersink Creek. We will also get to walk through a 10-year old prairie restoration adjacent to the fen. The field trip is on Saturday, October 10th, 2015 at 10:30 am. Directions: Please meet in the Pioneer Canoe Base parking lot south of the Nippersink Creek and west of Pioneer Road. This site is located east of Route 31 and north of Harts Road. Do not go in the main entrance for Glacial Park, as you will be too far west. Please contact Andy Olnas at (847) 840-2634 if you have any questions about the trip. We hope you'll be able to join us!

## KANKAKEE TORRENT CHAPTER (Kankakee)

On August 23, we toured Braidwood Dunes and Savanna Nature Preserve and Evans-Judge Preserve. Once the rain quit, we had a fine time. We saw and compared the marsh blazing stars and rough blazing stars, and observed how, after over 50 years, leadplant and goat's rue have still not recolonized an old field that otherwise is a dry-mesic savanna with a nice population of rattlebox (*Crotalaria sagittalis*), which we observed and shook. Swink & Wilhelm says that *Crotalaria* is a rare plant in the Chicago region, but it was happy here. We also enjoyed the little pink field milkwort (*Polygala sanguinea*) in both robust and tiny individuals, depending on soil moisture. We passed on the opportunity to wade out to a population of state-threatened, carnivorous, flat-leaved bladderwort (*Utricularia intermedia*), whose small, yellow flowers and tiny, fast-closing traps I had observed earlier in the week.

The surprise of the trip was finding a population of Pinesap (*Monotropa hypopitys*) at Braidwood. Botanists are in a state of chaos, but they generally agree that Pinesaps are related to Ericaceous plants, such as the blueberries and huckleberries that grow so prolifically in our sands. Like the American Thismia (*Thismia americana*), pinesap is a perennial mycoheterotroph, meaning that it produces no chlorophyll, but steals its food from fungi, which have already stolen it from green plants. It is unclear from my reading which fungi and green plants are involved, except that it appears to be at least several different species of each. What a rogue's gallery we have in our sands. On your next visit, hold onto your wallet because the place is full of thieves!

Our first find at Evans-Judge was a tragedy. On the edge of the newly paved road, we found a dead slender glass lizard (*Ophisaurus attenuatus*). These legless lizards are distinguished from snakes by the presence of movable eyelids, ear openings, inflexible jaws and smooth belly scales. It is the latter feature that led to the poor animal's death. Capable of slithering on the roughly rolled pavement near the berm, it became trapped when it entered the smoothly rolled, fresh pavement of the road proper. All of its slithering failed to propel it an inch, and it could not escape back to rough terrain. The sun shone down and it slowly cooked. We arrived to find a very warm and perfect specimen, without a single blemish or sign of injury.

In the seep community at Evans-Judge, we observed the state-endangered early dark green rush (*Scirpus hattorianus*) which had already formed small, dark black seed heads. This population is colonizing an area where common reed (*Phragmites australis*) has been sprayed. We also enjoyed seeing hundreds of common boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) and numerous white turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) in bloom, along with a large colony of Queen of the Prairie (*Filipendula rubra*), which appears to be incapable of setting seed, due to self-sterility issues. The District is considering working with other agencies to reestablish genetic diversity here and a reproductive colony.



White Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)

## **QUAD CITIES CHAPTER (Rock Island)**

On the bright and warm afternoon of September 14, nearly 30 commissioners, staff and resident interns of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) met at the 80 acre Collinson Ecological Preserve in Milan, Illinois.

A gift to The Nature Conservancy in 1991 from Martha and Elinor Budelier, the site was purchased from the Conservancy by Augustana College in 1992 with funds from the Collinson Stone Company. The site is a mosaic of mature upland forest, small streams, high quality hill prairies and a Devonian limestone outcrop above Mill Creek.

In 2007 the western 20 acres (including the forested buffer zone) of the site were dedicated as the *Josua Lindahl Hill Prairies Nature Preserve* to protect and enlarge the hill prairies, a threatened ecosystem in Illinois. Subsequent monies provided by the Illinois State Wildlife Grants have made it possible to significantly expand the two core hill prairies with a corridor between them as existed a century ago before fire was suppressed and woody species invaded.

The visiting members of the INPC enjoyed the lush growth of big and little bluestem, sideoats grama grass, lead plant, ladies' tresses orchid and other species that flourished after the heavy summer rains of 2015. Also observed was the rare hill's thistle on the north unit of the prairie complex. On the return trip through the forest to the parking area some members of the group collected a new, recently discovered exotic - the Amur corktree (*Phellodendron amurense*). This invasive joins other exotics such as bush honeysuckle, winged wahoo, English ivy, Japanese barberry, and Oriental bittersweet as a target of management concern.

The commission members of the INPC held their late summer meeting the next day, September 15, at the Black Hawk State Historic Site in Rock Island, which is also a dedicated nature preserve. The Commission originated in 1963 and was the first of its kind in the nation.

In addition to the Collinson Ecological Preserve, Augustana College also owns and manages the 100 acre Beling Ecological Preserve on the north Shore of Rock River in Moline and the 420 acre Green Wing Environmental Laboratory adjacent to Amboy in Lee County, IL.

## **Welcome to New and Returning INPS Members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Chapter</b>
Elizabeth Plonka	Northeast
John and Lisa Ayres	Northeast
Michelle Gudyka	Northeast
Mike Kunowski	Northeast
Michel Hansen	Kankakee Torrent
Eric Engstrom	Quad Cities
Dave Roberts	Central
Aimee Hemphill/Sam Spiller	Southern
Corey Jones	Southern
Martha Langill	Southern
Kevin Boucher	Southern
Beth Fisher	Southern



Heath Aster (*Symphyotrichum ericoides*)

## **SOUTHERN CHAPTER (Carbondale)**

The Southern chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society recently held a fern workshop at Camp Ondessonk in Ozark, Illinois. Eleven participants joined instructors Chris Benda and Eric Ulaszek for a study of the wild native ferns of the southern Illinois region. We started at Camp Ondessonk by exploring the Pakentuck area, which is the site of the highest free-flowing waterfall in Illinois at approximately 93 feet. On the top of the sandstone bluffs we located Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Common Woodsia fern (*Woodsia obtusa*), Hairy Lip fern (*Cheilanthes lanosa*), and Ebony Spleenwort fern (*Asplenium platyneuron*), not to mention the Rattlesnake Plantain and Fall Coralroot Orchids we saw in the pine plantation by the vehicles! When we later saw the Crane-fly and Twayblade orchids I thought this could very well be an orchid foray!

We climbed down the bluff and observed Netted Chain fern (*Woodwardia areolata*) and Rock Polypody fern (*Polypodium virginianum*) in a narrow rock passageway. Farther along the trail we walked by some Maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*) and Marginal Shield fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*). I joked that I prefer to call it Exceptional Shield fern! At the base of the waterfall we took a group photo and saw a few small individuals of Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) by the trail. We made our way under the expansive sandstone overhang that comprises the waterfall where we observed Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and some Sphagnum moss. On our way back to the main trail, we spotted three ferns I had been on the lookout for at this site, but had not found previously, Resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis polypodioides*), Pinnatifid Spleenwort fern (*Asplenium pinnatifidum*), and Walking fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*). On our way back up the hill to our lunch spot, we observed more ferns including Broad Beech fern (*Phegopteris hexagonoptera*), Cut-leaved Grape fern (*Sceptridium dissectum* var. *obliquum*), and Rattlesnake fern (*Botrypus virginianum*).

Lunch at Kane Lake was splendid and the weather for the entire weekend was pleasant. For the afternoon, we hiked to Split Rock Natural Area within the adjacent Shawnee National Forest land to a spot where some uncommon ferns grow. On the way, we detoured to see Filmy fern (*Vandenboschia boschiana*), a rare fern in southern Illinois, growing high up on the rock face. Nearby we looked at some Horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*). Then we walked to a nice, shaded, and moist rock ledge where Clubmoss (*Huperzia porophila*), Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), and Spinulose Shield fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) grow. We made our way back to camp and reveled in our amazing 21 species of fern and fern allies observed on our first day!



On day two we went to Ferne Clyffe State Park and Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge to target fern species not yet observed. But first we stopped at a small sandstone overhang near the entrance to Camp Ondessonk where I knew we could see some Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). On the Round Bluff Nature Preserve trail, we found the rare Hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctiloba*), along with Maidenhair Spleenwort fern (*Asplenium trichomanes*) and Fragile fern (*Cystopteris protrusa*). After a picnic lunch, we headed to the Rocky Bluff trail at Crab Orchard to find some more new species of ferns to add to our list. Eric knew about some Tennessee Bladder fern (*Cystopteris tennesseensis*) behind the waterfall, and farther down the trail we found Goldie's fern (*Dryopteris goldiana*) and Glade fern (*Diplazium pycnocarpon*). We ended the day looking at another orchid, Ladies' Tresses (*Spiranthes ovalis*) in bloom, and were all very satisfied with the total 28 species of ferns and fern allies observed in two days. That is over half of all the ferns in southern Illinois! The workshop was a tremendous success and made possible by a grant from the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund. See a photo album of the species we observed at

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1025841220780357.1073741835.175434959154325&type=3>

# QUIET PLACES

## SWEET FERN SAVANNA LAND AND WATER PRESERVE

By Victor M. Cassidy

Marianne Hahn is one super-duper volunteer! In the early 1990s, she was volunteer steward of the Homewood Izaak Walton Prairie Preserve. Later in the decade, she helped to get the Joliet Arsenal converted to the Midewin Tallgrass Prairie. She has volunteered for years at the Kankakee Sands prairie-savanna complex that spans the boundary of Indiana and Illinois. One day, she began thinking that it would be nice to manage a natural area that was hers and hers alone.

A friend told her that she might find restore-able acreage in Pembroke Township. Located in the Kankakee Sands area, Pembroke was settled after the Civil War by freedmen from South Carolina who farmed its poor, sandy soils. Many of their descendants still live in the Pembroke area.

Hahn told a Pembroke realtor that she wanted to buy hunting land, not mentioning that her intention was to hunt plants, not deer. Sixty acres came onto the market in April of 1999. She closed on the land in November and began what she calls “the longest, most exciting field trip of my life, a trip that continues to this day.”

The original site was a narrow strip  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long. Over the past 15 years, Hahn has acquired 33 contiguous parcels for a current total of 135 acres. Protected under a conservation easement, Sweet Fern is legally a “land and water preserve,” she explains. If it were designated an Illinois Nature Preserve, hunting would be forbidden and she already has too many deer and wild turkeys.

The previous owner occasionally farmed corn and soybeans on part of the land, did little to the remainder, and kept visitors away. Hahn left the successional agricultural fields alone and native plants came up from the seed bank. The little-disturbed part of the site is bands of plant habitat, which are roughly parallel to the road. From front to back, these are dry to dry-mesic sand prairie; dry-mesic sand savanna; sand flatwoods; and sand forest.

As she started work on Sweet Fern Savanna in 2000, Hahn invited botanist friends in for a look. They were wowed by what they saw and soon she had an all-star cast of naturalists (many are leading lights of the INPS) poking everywhere on her site. Over a thirteen-year period, they identified 440 native plant species, of which sixteen are state-listed. Illinois’ largest population of *Comptonia peregrina* (called Sweet Fern, Hahn says, but it’s a shrub, not a fern) grows on the site, hence its name. There are two state-listed animals. An entomologist has identified hundreds of insect species.

Hahn says calls Sweet Fern a “high quality remnant,” and views herself as manager of the land. She’s mowed trails that serve as firebreaks when she burns. A modular home was demolished before she came, but she left its concrete pad in place because animals live beneath the slab. After removing barbed wire and junk, she built two small bridges, put in two short paths, cut down a big stand of aspen, and took out cherry trees, reed canary grass, and pulled sweet clover. Before filling in a drainage ditch, she inspected it, found unusual plants there, used buckets to take up ditch soil and sand with seeds in it, and put this material on top of the ditch when she was done filling it. She also constructed two wooden picnic tables—one was stolen, but the other is now covered with lichens and looks very rustic.

On the day of our visit, we saw the State-listed Regal Fritillary butterfly, old plainsman (*Hymenopappus scabiosaeus*), the insectivorous narrow-leaved sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), primrose-leaved violet (*Viola primulifolia*), and Carey’s heartsease (*Persicaria careyi*). We also saw lots of Hahn’s favorite plant Meadow Beauty (*Rhexia virginica*) and gobs of healthy toads and frogs.

Sweet Fern is a gated site, but Hahn is quite welcoming to people who obtain her permission to enter. Groups have come out to the site and Plants of Concern monitors its endangered species every year. Contact Hahn through the INPS.



Large Cottonweed  
(*Froelichia floridana*)



Marsh Blazing Star  
(*Liatris spicata*)

# TEACHING GARDENERS HOW TO GROW WILD FLOWERS

By Carol Rice

*Since the late 1980s, **Carol Rice** has worked with the non-profit Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee (WPPC), which is active in McHenry County and the surrounding area. The WPPC promotes the use of native plants in the landscape through preservation, propagation, and education. It gives grants of native plants to schools for outdoor classrooms and provides native plants to municipal sites and nature centers. WPPC also supports several environmental groups.*

In 2004, after a visit to a member's back yard native plant garden, the WPPC decided to start a mentoring program to encourage homeowners to plant native plants gardens. We called it **A Natural Garden in Your Back Yard**. We assembled our first class one year later—ten mentors who knew native plants and about a dozen mentees.

Mentors and mentees were paired up according to the nature of the property (sun/shade, dry/moist), the location (so the mentor would not have to travel too far), the level of mentee knowledge, and—as much as possible—a good fit.

Mentors were expected to spend from ten to twelve hours with each mentee. The process is:

- Initial visit to determine a site for the native plant garden;
- Advise on site preparation;
- Meetings to work on plant selection and garden plan; and
- A visit to advise at the time of planting. One or two follow up visits are recommended.

As our program has matured, we have:

- Seen an increase in the number of mentors and mentees. Some motivated mentees have spent a year as a co-mentor and then have become mentors on their own.
- Added program features—educational evening classes; mentee yard walks; a seed sharing event; and a self-guided tour to celebrate our 100-yard milestone.
- Seen WPPC grow as former mentees join—and bring friends, which creates a vibrant community of shared interests.



New applicants are invited to a kick-off program where they meet current mentors and mentees—and know from the start that they are part of a community. All new applicants receive a free packet of materials including **Native Plants in the Home Landscape** by Keith Nowakowski; catalogs from the Prairie Moon and Prairie Nursery; checklists; resource information; and sample plant lists and garden plans. The evening includes introductions, a Power Point presentation, and a Q&A session. The only expense is the plants that new applicants buy—and the WPPC offers discounts.

We encourage mentees to plant about 100 square feet—not too large, but big enough for a planting that includes 25 to 30 species with several of each. We view the garden as a living classroom that provides the homeowner with a knowledge base. Our program starts in fall, which allows time to prepare the planting site and plan the garden prior to the spring planting. Mentees with larger properties gain knowledge which can lead to expansion of their native gardens.

*Continued from page 7*

Since inception, we have interviewed 183 candidates. Of these, 162 will have completed their plantings when this year's class gets its garden in this year. At least 65 mentees have enlarged their gardens, hosted yard walks, become mentors, or volunteered for WPPC. Nineteen former mentees are now mentors.

Elements to consider in establishing a native plant mentoring program:

- Identify people who can mentor.
- Consider source of plants.
- Determine how to attract applicants.
- Determine mentors' responsibilities and how they will be matched up with mentees.
- Plan for a possible surplus of applicants.
- Establish a calendar (fall start date works best for us).
- Follow up with mentees, encourage them to photograph their gardens and take notes, seek their feedback on the program, consider giving them written materials, and make a path for mentees to become mentors.
- Remind everyone that mentors aren't professionals—they are volunteers with knowledge to share.

For more information, visit <http://thewppc.org>. E-mail [goforsix@aol.com](mailto:goforsix@aol.com) to request our handouts.

## **PRESCRIBED BURNING IN ILLINOIS: A LANDOWNER'S RIGHT**

**By Floyd Catchpole**

Illinois has a friendly legal and social environment for prescribed burning, as well as ecosystems that are among the most fire-dependent in the nation. We are still in the infancy of the prescribed burning movement, however, and greater education, training, and organizing is needed to allow fire to be widely used as a land management tool.

You may wonder why you want to burn your property. There are many reasons, both utilitarian and aesthetic. Fire is a very useful tool. Instead of raking leaves into a stinking burn pile and watching it smolder for hours, you may wish to burn the leaves in place. A landscape, leaf-litter under fire under cool conditions can burn leaves much cleaner and faster than piled leaves, and with flame lengths that rarely exceed four inches.

Fire also helps to control some invasive species. Fire alone may eliminate Japanese barberry and smaller bush honeysuckle. In other instances, such as reed canary grass, Hungarian brome, and some forbs, fire removes litter so smaller amounts of herbicide can more effectively kill the invasives.

Almost all native plants respond positively to fire, with flowers blooming exuberantly after burns. All the evidence we have suggests that people burned Illinois frequently and northeast Illinois on a near-annual basis for thousands of years. Our plants, animals, and ecosystems adapted to this regular fire regimen by predicting the highly diverse, tallgrass prairie ecosystem that included open prairies, marshes, sedge meadows and savannas, with woodlands in more fire sheltered areas. In the absence of fire, this landscape rapidly converts to dense forests and swamps, and in the process, loses almost of the biodiversity that took thousands of years to accumulate.

But there is hope that we can leave a world rich in butterflies and flowers to our children. In 2007, the state of Illinois passed the Illinois Prescribed Burning Act (525 ILCS 37) (Act; [www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0108](http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0108)). The Act has several aspects that are very significant for landowners wishing to perform prescribed burning on their property. Of greatest importance, it states that prescribed burning is a landowner's property right, is in the public interest, and reduces liability risks by requiring that negligence must be proven if the landowner follows the process laid out in the Act.

The first steps in burning your property with reduced liability are to either become an Illinois Certified Burn Manager ([www.ilga.gov/comission/jcar/admincode/017/0170156500002R.html](http://www.ilga.gov/comission/jcar/admincode/017/0170156500002R.html)) or to hire/recruit one to burn your land. With a written burn plan meeting the requirements of the Act (Section 156.30), an IEPA Open Burning Permit for ecological and Landscape Burns (submit Form APC 325 at least 90 days in advance; [www.epa.state.il.us/air/permits/openburn/open-burning-permit-app.pdf](http://www.epa.state.il.us/air/permits/openburn/open-burning-permit-app.pdf)), proper notifications of neighbors and fire departments and appropriate weather, the Certified Burn Manager is ready to burn with the benefits of reduced liability provided by the Act.

Smoke management concerns, especially in more densely settled area and for larger burns, should be a consideration of all burn managers. In northeast Illinois, burns may not be performed when air pollution levels exceed 100. It is never nice to smoke out your neighbors, so you should burn with good smoke lift and have the burn over before evening, when smoke typically drops to the ground.

Another option for efficient burning is to form a private land management partnership, like our Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association ([www.sibpa.org](http://www.sibpa.org)). By organizing, funds and grants can be more easily required, allowing the group to purchase equipment and organize training for members and the public. With the amount of private burning now occurring in northeast Illinois, it seems that this area is ripe for the formation of a land management partnership.

# CAREX CORNER: THE WEE SEDGES

By Linda Curtis



The author at work

While some *Carex* species are meter or more tall, especially in sedge meadows, some are small and easily overlooked.

Our smallest and earliest sedge is *C. richardsonii* that blooms in March and April and has matured perigynia before June when most sedges bloom. Since *Carex* have no petals, the bloom is the stamens with golden anthers in the terminal male spike, and whitish stigmas that protrude from the perigynia in the lower female spikes.

Fig 1. *Carex richardsonii*. Hummock Sedge, grows in sand prairies. Along woodland trails and some home lawns with a shady border, *C. blanda*'s male spike is between two female spikes instead of overtopping them.

Fig. 2. *Carex blanda*, Charming Sedge, may grow for three years from seedling to mature perennial, but then produces a good number of fertile culms that splay around the tuft of wide 6-10 mm leaves. The leaves have a strong midvein plus two lateral veins that give the impression of a W or M in cross-section. Sedge expert Dr. Anthony Reznicek (MICH) tells his students in jest that the leaves are a W in Wisconsin and a M in Michigan. (Botany students always laugh at their instructor's jokes.)



Fig 1. Hummock Sedge  
(*Carex richardsonii*)



Fig 2. Charming Sedge  
(*Carex blanda*)



Shaved Sedge (*Carex tonsa*)

## HOW BLIND PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE PRAIRIE

By Victor M. Cassidy

Blind people use their senses to experience the prairie. They touch plants to discover how they're made, engaging with flowers and rough silphium leaves. They smell coneflower seeds too and experience prairie topography as they walk through level areas, climb hills, and cross bridges. The blind are full of spirit and curiosity—and they are engaging companions.

We learned this during a special expedition to Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie on September 12. The group included ten employees of Horizons for the Blind in Crystal Lake. Several volunteers served as keepers for the blind. There were four Girl Scouts from Troop 1017, a cheerful woman who introduced herself as “Al Wilson’s printer,” two additional volunteers, and Sue Harney, Dundee Township Supervisor. Our hosts were Al Wilson, Site steward and his wife Barbara.



Camille Caffarelli takes seeds of Gray-Headed coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*) from the hands of a volunteer. She enjoyed their anise smell.



Samantha Wagner (“Al Wilson’s printer”) leads Frank Cosatino, employee of Horizons for the Blind through Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie.



Shannon Cosatino holds the flowers of Queen Anne’s Lace (*Daucus carota*) to get a sense of its construction.

# Ozark Hill Prairie Research Natural Area

## *Saving natural areas, one fire at a time*

*By Christopher David Benda*

Southern Illinois is fortunate to be home to a diverse mix of plants and animals, many of which only occur in high quality forest, wetland, and grassland remnants. A crucial first step was getting these lands (called natural areas) identified and protected. Conventional wisdom at the time thought it was enough to save these lands from development and they would thrive on their own. However, due to fire suppression and invasive species, some natural areas have changed drastically.

One of the unique natural areas in southern Illinois is the Ozark Hill Prairies Research Natural Area. This site occurs in Alexander County and is managed by the Shawnee National Forest. Land managers at the Shawnee National Forest became concerned when natural openings in the forest, identified as grade A hill prairies during the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory in 1976, became so overgrown by 2013 that they were barely discernible. Hardly a prairie plant could be found under the invading brush. They had to make a plan to rescue the prairies.



*Shawnee National Forest resource staff and Illinois Native Plant Society members discuss the recent management on the hill prairies.*



*Hill Prairie natural community at Ozark Hill Prairies RNA*

The biologists and staff at the Shawnee National Forest are obligated to follow best management practices through a transparent process that allows for public engagement and input. This can be a time-consuming and costly process, but the dedicated natural resource staff were able to get their plan approved and began management work at the Ozark Hill Prairies in the late fall of 2014. Because this site is so remote and the terrain is so hilly and steep, they had their work cut out for them. They had an ambitious plan to restore the hill prairies, and they were up for the challenge.

They cut the encroaching young woody growth at several of the hill prairies and prepared them for a prescribed burn. Clearing the shrubs and small trees and removing the woody debris allowed for more light to reach the herbaceous plants on the previously overgrown hill prairie. Next, a controlled burn by the Shawnee National Forest in the spring of 2015 promoted the renewal of the sun-loving, native, non-aquatic, perennial herbs, known as SNAPs, a term coined by ecologist Jack White.

The governing board of the Southern chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society gathered at the Ozark Hill Prairies Research Natural Area in early August of 2015 to see the restoration management and provide comments to the Shawnee National Forest biologists. We managed our way to several of the remote hill prairies where restoration had occurred.

The response of herbaceous plants was incredible. I had visited this site in 2011 and hardly a prairie plant could be found, much less any prairie openings. Now the prairie openings were obvious and filled with native prairie plants. The SNAPs were back! Management work is expected to continue at this area and other natural areas across the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois.

It is my hope that in the near future, the many conservation organizations in southern Illinois can work together to form a volunteer-led strike team that focuses on emergency resuscitations of remnant natural communities. There is more need than resource staff can handle and to me there is nothing more important than protecting the priceless biological heritage of the state of Illinois.



*Chris Evans and other INPS members evaluating the hill prairies.*

## NEWS (GOOD)

OAKtober 2015 Melissa Cusic, Chicago Region Trees Initiative Coordinator at the Morton Arboretum, announces that she has received a signed proclamation from Governor Rauner establishing October 2015 as OAKtober—Oak Awareness Month!!

OAKtober is an opportunity for individuals, organizations, and agencies throughout Illinois to recognize and support oaks and oak ecosystems during the month of October. The Chicago Region Trees Initiative is registering and posting oak-related events (<http://chicagorti.org/resources/oaktober-oak-awareness-month>).

The Morton Arboretum is doing its part by hosting the 8th International Oak Society Conference, October 18-21, 2015. An international group of oak experts from around the world will participate in the conference, presenting the latest research.



“Saving Trees from Extinction,” the October 18 keynote address, is open to the public. The speaker is Sara Oldfield, co-chair of the IUCN/SSC Global Tree Specialist Group. To register for the keynote and to obtain a full schedule of events, visit [mortonarb.org/ios2015](http://mortonarb.org/ios2015).

Plans for the full conference presentations from many of the world’s leading oak researchers; opportunities to get involved in oak conservation worldwide; and presentations and workshops on oak collecting, managing oak collections, oak-focused botanical art, new varieties of oaks, growing oaks, oak folklore, and other topics. Attendees will tour the Morton Arboretum’s world-renowned oak collection and its oak ecosystem restorations. In addition to all this, there will be an acorn exchange and a gala banquet with a talk on the life and legacy of the passenger pigeon by Chicago naturalist author Joel Greenberg.

## NEWS (BAD)



The Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board has been eliminated and the director has been laid off. There is no future intention of funding the program says the Illinois state government.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Illinois are threatened with closing. The State of Illinois has not passed a budget that includes Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The INPS lost its insurance through the state as of September 30th. This also means that cost share programs for conservation and educational events will end. To protest, contact Office of the Governor, Bruce Rauner, 207 State House, Springfield, IL 62706 Phone: 217-782-0244. Please contact your local legislator too.

## COMING EVENTS

From Cemetery Prairies to National Tallgrass Prairies is the title of the 24th North American Prairie Conference, scheduled for July 17-20, 2016 at Illinois State University in Normal. Featured speakers will include Michael Jeffords, co-author of *Butterflies of Illinois*; Jeff Wall co-author of *Illinois Birds: a Century of Change*; Chris Helzer, author of *The Ecology and Management of Prairies in the Central United States*; and Sara Baer, whose research combine ecological theory with restoration ecology. There will be field trips too. For more, visit [www.nap2016.illinoisstate.edu](http://www.nap2016.illinoisstate.edu).

## READING (GOOD)

Tom Lerzak, biologist with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, has published an essay entitled *Woody Vegetation Regrowth Following Fire* that he illustrates with especially informative photographs. His essay is too long to publish here, but readers should visit his blog *The River Landing* at [http://theriverlanding.typepad.com/the\\_river\\_landing/2015/08/woody-vegetationregrowth-following-prairie-fire.html](http://theriverlanding.typepad.com/the_river_landing/2015/08/woody-vegetationregrowth-following-prairie-fire.html).

— 24th North American Prairie Conference —

*From Cemetery Prairies to National Tallgrass Prairies*

July 17-20, 2016 | Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois

[www.nap2016.illinoisstate.edu](http://www.nap2016.illinoisstate.edu)

JOHN USher invited visitors on landscape scale restoration, status of grassland birds, and much more! Featured speakers include: Michael Jeffords co-author of *Butterflies of Illinois*; Jeff Wall co-author of *Illinois Birds: a Century of Change*; Chris Helzer author of *The Ecology and Management of Prairies in the Central United States*; Sara Baer whose research combine ecological theory with restoration ecology. There will be more than 70 oral papers on many aspects of prairie ecology, restoration, management and some innovative ideas on working lands.

**WE ARE HONORING**

Pete Schramm, the individual responsible for organizing the first North American Prairie Conference hosted at Knox College in Carleburg, Illinois in 1966.

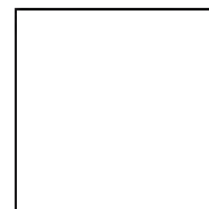
“Rainbow Prairies” Sugar Grove Prairie, Funks Grove  
Photograph by Robert Shaw, Wild Perceptions

# ILLINOIS NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Forest Glen Preserve  
20301 E. 900 North Road  
Westville, IL 61883

[illinoisplants@gmail.com](mailto:illinoisplants@gmail.com)

[www.ill-inps.org](http://www.ill-inps.org)



*Dodecatheon frenchii* –  
French's Shooting Star

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## 2015 Autumn Harbinger – October 2015

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[www.ill-inps.org/member](http://www.ill-inps.org/member)

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